



The Meeting of the Ways

By I. A. R. Wylie

Author of "The Day of Days," "The Paupers of Portman Square," etc.

THERE is one place in the world where loyalty to one's pals is neither appreciated nor rewarded—rather, it is penalized. Kathleen Hobson, more usually known as "Kit 'Obson," or still more familiarly as "Curlers," reckoned that it had cost her exactly an extra month.

In an ordinary way, she would have been let down lightly. She was pretty, and, among other talents, was able to assume at a moment's notice an air of demure and childlike innocence which suited her admirably for the part of tool or victim of a cunning and unprincipled male partner. But in this particular case, there was no partner—or, at any rate, no tangible partner. She had been caught red-handed and alone sauntering out of a Park Lane mansion at midnight, for all the world as if the place belonged to her.

Afterward, of course, the police realized that her insolent obviousness had been a trick—covering the flight of some one more important, with various valuables that the Park Lane mansion was likely to mourn in vain. And consequently the police were annoyed with Miss Kathleen Hobson; the judge was annoyed with her; the crown prosecutor was annoyed with her; every one was annoyed with her except the spectators at the back of the court, who giggled rapturously at her openly expressed contempt for authority and still more at her provocative silences.

She had a wink for all of them—for the judge and the irate gentleman who said rude things about her, for the police and the usher and, in fact, any one who chanced to catch her eye. It was a wonderful wink. As a music-hall turn it would have brought the house down. But the Old Bailey is notoriously unappreciative where true talent is concerned.

So Kit 'Obson retired from public life for a whole year and was recommended to consider herself lucky. Only her youth and a marked mental deficiency—displayed in her obvious inability to discover majesty in a bewigged and angry old gentleman—saved her from the full penalty. The judge said as much. In fact, it was his Parthian shot, and for a moment he thought he had got the upper hand at last. But at the top of the fateful stairs, she looked back at him, her head a little to one side, one eye closed.

It was a super-wink, full of a friendly, diabolically wicked understanding.

A tactful wardress hurried her on her way.

In October Kit went in, and in October she came out.

It was a Monday morning. The chaplain had paid her a last visit, and the governor had admonished her, murmuring something about "this great opportunity" that appeared more than usually pointless. She shook hands

with the chaplain and smiled upon the governor. She bore them no ill will at all. They were both of them obtuse in their several ways, but probably they had been born so and therefore were not accountable.

"I likes your face," she told the governor, "and I'd 'ate to think we was never to meet again. But some'ow I feels it ain't for long. So keep your 'eart up, old boy, and don't let 'em see you cryin'."

It was raining. The half dozen sullen-faced women who shared Kit's release scattered silently, but she herself lingered, apparently uncertain as to her destination. There was a man across the road who interested her. He wore the determinedly commonplace clothes and the air of strained indifference that are familiar to all evildoers, and his blank unconsciousness of Kit's existence was almost too natural. So Kit did not go home. She went east and then north and then south; and when she had got south, she seemed to remember some important engagement west.

In the Piccadilly tube, she came to a standstill just at the gates of the city lifts. She was staring vaguely around her, evidently looking for somebody, but at the very last moment, she slipped into a descending cage, and the gate clicked neatly in the face of the inconspicuous gentleman. Kit blew him a kiss. Perhaps the kiss disarmed him, or the next lift was too slow. At any rate, Kit did not see him again.

It was night before she reached home. Home was a room at the back of a dingy, unwholesome old-clothes shop in an even dingier side street off the Walworth Road. Her whole family was gathered to welcome her. None of them were related to her by blood. She had picked them up, or they had picked her up, in the course of business. There were half a dozen of them—men and women, mostly older than

she—clustered about a dirty, food-littered table, like old, hoary spiders in a dusty, forgotten web.

There was one young man with small eyes and a brutal jaw. He attempted to kiss the returned prodigal as she came in, and she slapped his face absent-mindedly, as if it had become a habit. But on his persisting, she turned on him in a gust of anger.

"You get a bit above yourself, Jim 'Arris," she said, between her set white teeth. "I won't 'ave it—and you knows it. You'd better leave me alone."

He shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Ain't we old pals?"

"You may be an old pal. You're a sight too fresh for me," she retorted, grinning.

She sat down at her place at the table and looked around the circle of faces questioningly. She was not like any of them—not yet. There was real gold in her short curly hair, real warmth in her eyes. Her tight little mouth could smile frankly; the cynicism that lurked at the corners had not yet hardened. But she was the beginning of what the others had become. The old hag at the far end of the table, slicing up the bread, might once have had golden hair and laughing eyes.

"Late, aren't yer?" she asked, pitching Kit's portion on to her plate. "In my day, we was turned out early."

"That's right. So I was. But there was a beastly nark on me 'eels all day. And I didn't want to bring 'im 'ere. Afterward it got so dark I could 'ardly see me way." She paused, frowning with sudden recollection. "Wot's the matter with the place? Used to be more lamps in this street—or else me sight's goin'."

A grin went round the table. Her neighbor patted her on the arm.

"Things *do* 'appen in a year, dearie. Never 'eard tell o' the war in your 'appy 'ome, eh?"

"War? Wot war?"

"Lor'—*the* war, of course."

"Wot's it abart this time?"

"Germany takin' wot ain't 'ers." The old woman winked solemnly. "Nasty, 'orrid thing to do, ain't it?"

There was a roar of laughter. Kit buried her face in her mug.

"Well—'oo cares? Let 'em cut each other's throats." She waited a moment as if listening for something, and then shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Anythink doin'?" she asked.

"Not much. Things a bit too uncertainlike. Best to lie low." The old woman put her hand to the bosom of her dress and drew out a packet of letters which she tossed onto the table. "But I've got that for you—prigged them orf a dyin' girl when I was in 'orspital. They ain't no good to me. Maybe you can use 'em."

Kit turned the letters over inquisitively.

"References—testimonials—— Wot's all this? Lady's maid to 'er grace the Duchess of Irrington. Wot's the good of it, eh?"

"Lor', Kit! They 'aven't done much to brighten yer, 'ave they, now? Didn't I say the girl's dead? She was goin' to a swell's 'ouse—and them's 'er references. 'Aven't yer seen yet, dearie?"

The girl brooded a moment. A faint color of excitement crept into her cheeks. Her eyes shone.

"You bet yer life I see! It's the very job! Ever see me do the lady's maid, boys? Mammy, you'll 'ave to lend that lovely 'ead of 'air for me to practice on. I'll get 'Arry on to this. 'E'll work it with me. 'E's my man." She looked sharply from one face to another. "Wot are you orl grinnin' at? 'Aven't said anythin' funny, 'ave I? Wot's the joke?"

They did not answer immediately. They watched her cautiously, and little by little the color died out of her face and her eyes grew dark and savage and afraid. It was the boy with the ugly

jaw who spoke at last. He stuck his hands in his pockets and surveyed her insolently.

"You won't work with 'Arry again," he said.

"Wot's that?"

"You 'eard wot I said."

"Better say it again," she menaced.

"Ain't it struck you as queer, 'is not bein' 'ere to-night—and you 'is best girl and orl?"

She brought her clenched fist down on the table with a ringing blow.

"They never copped 'im! They couldn't 'ave. I never breathed a word."

"I knows you didn't. You was game orl through. And 'e ain't been copped, neither."

"Then——" She grew suddenly very still. A kindling terror shriveled the youth in her face. Her voice sounded as if her throat were dry with dust. "For Gawd's sake, tell me—tell me quick or I'll do for one of you!"

Harris burst out laughing.

"Did yer think 'e was dead? Not 'e. But you'll not see 'im again. 'E's gone wrong—gone to the bowwows."

"Where is 'e?"

"I dunno—and I don't care. But 'e won't put 'is nose in 'ere again—not if I knows it! The dirty dog!"

The silence was broken by the sound of some one opening the shop door. They looked at one another, for to them all sounds were significant, pregnant with danger, and then Harris went out. He came back a moment later and jerked his thumb over his shoulder. His square face was suffused with passion.

"'E's there—of all the blasted cheek! 'E wants to see you. But don't you do it, Kit. 'E's a bad un—a dirty 'ound."

She pushed him contemptuously aside. A man was standing in the narrow passage between the counter and the sordid piles of cast-off clothing. In the dim light from a flickering gas jet,

he looked bigger and taller than she had known him—or perhaps it was the unfamiliar greatcoat that he wore. She did not stop to think. She went straight to him, and his arms closed about her and held her with a hungry, almost desperate passion.

"My girl—my own girl!"

"Oh, 'Arry, I was afraid. They were 'avin' me on abart you—makin' me think you was dead or copped, the silly blighters!—and you're safe—orl right."

"Thanks to you for that." He looked down into her eager face with a wondering pride. "You straight, plucky kid! Saved me, you did, never winked an eyelid—stuck it—gave me my chance. Gawd, but wot I've felt like sometimes—thinkin' of you——"

She laughed softly.

"Garn, you silly! Wot's it matter? 'Ere I am, and 'ere you are. It's orl done. We'll be slicker next time." She drew him toward the inner room. "You'd best come in now, boy. I've got somethin' all 'ot to tell you."

He held his ground.

"I ain't comin' in, Kit."

"Why not?"

"Them and me's 'ad a bust. It's finished. I'd not 'ave come 'ere to-night—only for you."

She stood still, looking at him. Now for the first time she noticed the color of his coat—the cap that he held in one unsteady hand.

"Wot's the game, 'Arry?" she asked, very quietly.

"I'm goin' to the front next month."

"And wot cher goin' to do there?"

"Fight."

"'Oo are you goin' to fight?"

"Them Germans."

"Wot 'ave them Germans done to you?"

Their voices had sunk almost to an undertone. They stood quite close to each other, but they no longer touched each other. Something alien and antagonistic had sprung up between them.

He looked at her helplessly and yet with a kind of stubborn resolution.

"They ain't done nothin' to me, but they've done things to other folks—smashed—taken wot wasn't theirs—broken into places where they 'adn't no right——"

She began to laugh.

"Ain't we done that, too?"

"Yes," he muttered, "we 'ave. But that was different. We was the little uns up against the swells—and, any'ow, p'r'aps—I dunno—p'r'aps we was wrong——"

It seemed as if she had not heard him. She put her hands on his shoulders. She tossed back the curls from her small, elfish face and her eyes sparkled their allurements.

"'Arry—I've got a job for you and me—somethin' first class and easy as you please. It's a sure thing. I wouldn't work it with no one else but you. You'll take it on, boy? Won't leave a pal in an 'ole, would yer?"

"No." He caught her back into his arms. He kissed her ready lips with a wild desire. "Marry me!" he panted. "Marry me, Kit! I can't do without you. I ain't got no one but you in the whole world. I can't lose you! I can't go out there and know I 'aven't a soul—not a soul wot cares! I can't, ol' girl! I wants yer! Maybe I'll not come back. I must 'ave my bit of life—of—of——"

The word "love" stuck in his tightening throat. There were tears on his good-looking, rather simple face. She brushed them away with a light hand.

"You'll 'ave it orl right, 'Arry."

"You'll do it, Kit? My girl—I'll make over all the pay I can to you—and there'll be the allowance—and you'll wait—and if I comes back, we'll start clean—honest like——"

The laughter in her eyes was dead.

"You're goin', then?"

He stammered pitifully.

"I've got to. I've given my word."

"Your word!" Her lip curled jeeringly. "Well—I'll not marry a redcoat."

"It ain't a redcoat. Maybe it's the only coat a man can wear these days."

"I don't care about its color—it's all the same. I'll 'ave no one wot fights for them dirty swells. I've fought 'em—and my man's got to fight 'em, too."

"It ain't for them swells," he pleaded. "It's for poor blokes—yes, and for you, too—for everybody 'ere."

"You're orf yer nut, 'Arry." She choked back her rage a moment longer. "See 'ere, boy. We took things wot wasn't ours, as you'd say, but it weren't only because we wanted 'em, were it? We 'ated those fine folk. We've always 'ated them. It's been them or us—and 'cause they've been strongest, we took the only line we could. And now they're gettin' up another war to wipe us out. Are *you* goin' to play their game?" He didn't answer. Her face was quite close to his. "Goin' to live honest, are yer? Do as everybody tells yer? 'Right about turn—eyes front. Go out and get killed'—is that yer little idea?"

"I got to," he whispered. "I dunno why. I can't explain. I ain't clever, Kit. I can't talk—but I knows I've got to."

His eyes pleaded with her. She drew back from him. Her face shone white with passion.

"If you goes, I'll work with Jim. I'll go with 'im—I'll marry 'im——"

"Kit—my girl——"

"I will—I swears it! You can choose."

"There ain't no choice. Kit—for Gawd's sake——"

She turned away from him. She went straight into the inner room, leaving the door open. There was a dead silence as she entered, for something in her ashen face checked their jeering. Harris, with his shoulders against the wall, watched her sullenly. It was

to him she spoke. Her voice rang with a steely clearness.

"I've done with that blighter," she said. "'E ain't my sort and never was. But I want a pal to work with. You'll do for me, Jimmy. Will you take on the job?"

He drew himself up. He came close to her, swaggering insolently, and blinked at her with his little glittering eyes.

"Yus. And I'll take you on, too."

She did not flinch.

"It's a deal, then?"

"A deal."

As their hands met, she lifted her head sharply, listening.

The door of the shop clanged dismally.

II.

He was an incongruous figure in the gold-and-blue setting of the Lady Anstruther's boudoir. His face was tanned with many winds, his uniform fitted him badly, and his hands were rough and red with hard usage. He was what once would have been called a "common soldier," but there was, in fact, nothing soldierly about him—except his dress—and nothing common. His features were sensitive, and their expression dreamy and rather timorous. The ill-fitting tunic was the fault rather of his stooping, scholarly shoulders than of the military tailor. Altogether, he was not impressive. But also—in some queer way—he was not ridiculous.

And one martial quality he undoubtedly possessed. He could hold his ground in the face of heavy odds. He was there when the first of Lady Anstruther's guests arrived, and he was there to watch the last take her rustling departure. A few spoke to him—with a hint of condescending amusement in their tone and manner—but the greater number ignored him. In any case, he never shifted from his post near the

door, where he watched and waited with a shy, yet stubborn patience.

At last the door closed finally. A richly shaded lamp threw deep shadows into the corners of the room, and for a moment Lady Anstruther believed herself alone and sighed wearily. Then she saw the man, standing there in the half light, and laughed.

"Why, John, you're a good 'stayer,' aren't you?" she exclaimed lightly. "I have a sort of feeling that you've been there—on that exact spot—all the afternoon. Was it truth or illusion?"

"Truth," he answered. He accepted her invitation to sit opposite her by the fire, moving awkwardly as if his feet were too heavy for him. "I've just been able to run up for the afternoon," he explained. "I thought—I felt I'd like just to see you. We're off to-morrow night."

"To France?"

He nodded, and there was a moment's silence. In the red glow of the firelight, the Lady Anstruther's face was grave and mocking and very sweet—like the face of a Dresden shepherdess whose shepherd has been more than usually foolish.

"Of course—you had to go," she said, "but you needn't have gone like that. It's rather absurd—a little humiliating—almost affected—an Anstruther among all those common people. Every one knows that, with your name and my money, you could have got a commission for the asking."

He bent forward a little, his red, swollen hands clasped between his knees, his face turned to the fire.

"Yes—I know, too. But I shan't make a good soldier, Dorothy. I want to go—I must go—but I'm not the sort to lead men into battle. I don't inspire respect—or—or anything much, for that matter." He gave a little strained laugh. "Because some big, brave ancestor of mine worried William the Conqueror at Hastings, there's no rea-

son why I should set myself above better men than I. As to your money—well, it's your money, not mine—and in any case, money doesn't count now."

"That sounds as if you hadn't had your share of our bargain," she remarked frowningly.

He flinched.

"I didn't mean that—of course. I've had more than my share. Only, for all practical purposes, our bargain ends here. I can't take your money where I'm going. A name is easily changed. That sounds maudlin—as if I were expecting pity or something. I didn't mean it that way. In any case—whether I come back or not—our bargain ends here."

"I don't quite understand, John. Are you proposing to divorce me?"

He made a fumbling gesture of appeal.

"Please don't make fun of me."

"I'm not. But, you see, I'm quite in the dark. Aren't you satisfied? Haven't I done everything to regild the Anstruther glories?"

"Everything. You've—you've been most generous. All I mean is—I can't come back to it, Dorothy. I'll set you free if I can. I can't touch your money again. I can't go out there—under this burden——"

"Burden?" she echoed, with a faint flush of anger.

His oversensitive face was set hard.

"Yes—burden," he said sharply. "I've got to be free, too. I can't go on—like this."

"I knew, of course, that ours was essentially a *mariage de convenance*," she observed at last, with regained calm. "I did not know you hated me. I don't think—if I had known—that I should have agreed to it. Hatred makes it too ugly." She gave her low, ironical little laugh. "Poor John! Did your people drive you to it? Was it as bad as all that? Well, I sympathize. I had my mother, you know. Greed on one

side—ambition on the other. A pretty pair!"

"You haven't quite understood," he said, almost inaudibly.

She bent forward, looking into his drawn, half-averted face with a cruel intentness.

"I'd like to understand. Won't you explain?"

"I had meant to—but now—I see that it is hardly worth while. In fact, I'm sorry I said anything at all. I suppose I'm rather out of hand—flustered. Soldiering goes to my head." He got up, trying to pull his tunic into smartness, and, seeing her expression, he managed a dry laugh. "It doesn't fit very well, does it?"

"No. I wish your conscience would have allowed a commission. I hate that ugly stuff."

"I'm sorry. It won't bother you again."

"Oh, I'm sure it will—I hope it will. Men like you always come through. It's the real fighter who goes under——" She broke off. "By the way, I've actually forgotten your regiment. If I write——"

"The Fifth Dorchesters. But you mustn't bother."

"I'll send you things—anything you want."

"It won't be necessary. I've left orders. Thank you all the same." He stood there for a moment stammering and awkward, and then abruptly held out his hand. "I—I hope you'll be all right—comfortable and all that."

"I'm sure I shall be. Servants will be my worst danger. All the men gone—and now a new maid!" She held up her free hand in mock horror. "Late of the Duchess of Irrington's household! Can you imagine my hair after she has done with it? If you can, it will give you something to laugh about out there."

"I shall often imagine your hair," he said with a quick, shy glance at her.

"It will be something beautiful to think about."

"How gallant of you! Well—good-by—good luck."

"Thank you."

He let her hand go and turned slowly toward the door. Under the deliberate formality of their farewell, a certain emotion had never been wholly absent. There had been annoyance—anger—bitterness—and now there was something uneasy, something vague that was like fear or regret.

"John," she said hurriedly, "I didn't mean to say anything unkind. You made me cross. No one likes to be called a burden. It made me say—more than was fair. I'm sorry. I do wish you luck—with all my heart."

"Thank you," he repeated. He did not look at her. He fumbled stupidly with the handle of the door. "You didn't quite understand. I was clumsy—as I always am—but I didn't mean that. I can't explain now. Perhaps—some day I shall."

He did not see her sudden gesture. He went out, and she heard his heavy tread on the stairs and then the dull clang of the street door. She stood there listening. There had been an odd, ugly finality in that sound. It shut out something—finished something.

She shivered a little.

—It was as if a chill gust of wind had blown through the whole house.

III.

So little was Lady Anstruther accustomed to consider the people who served her that she remembered her new maid only when she was seated before her looking-glass and the dense waves of fair hair had been let down about her shoulders. It was the clumsy, unaccustomed touch that reminded her. She looked up impatiently, and the glass reflected a demure, small face and downcast eyes and hair tinged with the

same gold as her own. But the short curls had been drawn back primly. Their confinement gave the girl an air of subdued, lurking elfishness.

Lady Anstruther sighed. It was worse and better than she had expected. The girl was at least presentable. But a groom would have had as much idea of dressing a lady's hair.

"What is your name?" Lady Anstruther asked.

"Anne, m'lady."

"The housekeeper tells me you were last with the Duchess of Irrington."

"Yes, m'lady."

"How long ago was that?"

"A year, m'lady."

"What have you been doing since?"

"Working in a government factory, m'lady."

Lady Anstruther sighed again. That accounted for the coarse hands and the coarse touch. The war was a great nuisance. It disorganized everything. In a fit of petulance, she dragged off her many rings. The wedding ring came last. She held it idly in the palm of her hand, considering it with a new interest as if she saw it for the first time. She had forgotten the girl behind her. She did not see the demure eyes follow the glittering stones. And if she had seen, she would have been little the wiser. For the eyes were bright, but quite expressionless.

Something sounded afar off. It was at first scarcely a sound at all—a pulse throbbing in the quiet distance, the beating of a giant heart. Then, as it came nearer, it became at once ominous and splendid, a music that thrilled the blood with joy and terror, horror and exultation, a song of two notes played to a dull, monotonous accompaniment, like the roll of thunder—the rat-a-tat-tat of drums—the thud of marching feet.

It was very still in the rich and beautiful room.

The maid was staring into the glass opposite her, and Lady Anstruther had

lifted her eyes from the ring lying in the palm of her hand. They were looking at each other, but they did not see each other. The superficial likeness between them—the mere coloring and character of features—was deepened in that moment to a real resemblance. Their faces were very white—almost dead looking. About their lips was the same hint of hardness—the hardness born of need and desire and the hardness born of surfeit and indifference. And in their eyes was the same expression.

The drums reached their climax and grew dim. Little by little, the noise of the traffic picked up the severed threads of the city's normal life. The eyes of the two women met with recognition. Something flashed up out of that brief encounter, something angry and antagonistic—the deep-seated distrust of class for class. It was like an ugly reptile, showing itself suddenly in a hissing, venomous hate, then sliding back into its secret lurking place.

"Have you any one at the front?" Lady Anstruther asked. She did not know why the question came to her. She did not like this girl, and it was not her way to be familiar.

The demure eyes dropped.

"No, m'lady."

"It is very comfortable—to have no one," Lady Anstruther remarked languidly.

The girl did not answer. She went on brushing Lady Anstruther's fair, luxuriant hair.

IV.

The two women lived together in a strange intimacy. It was the maid who brought Lady Anstruther her early morning tea, and the maid who closed the door of the softly lighted room the last thing at night. It was the maid who knew most accurately the mistress' daily incomings and outgoings. She knew where she went and how. She

knew her fads and fancies, all the details of her toilet. She knew of the eccentric husband who scarcely counted, and of the man who began to count more and more. No one could have given so complete an account of the Lady Anstruther's life as the demure-faced maid who served her.

And, on her side, Lady Anstruther knew that the girl was quick, prompt, discreet, increasingly skillful, honest—painfully honest. Other girls had taken their toll of the immense wardrobe. Anne Smith took nothing. The merest trifle was safe with her.

Yet the two women scarcely spoke to each other. Orders were given and received. The tones of command and acquiescence never changed. Their eyes met in the mirror a dozen times a day and were always blank and expressionless. It was as if they never saw each other save as reflections. They were ghosts to one another—shadows that came and went, bloodless, without reality.

The world tide of disaster and loss and suffering rose higher. They never spoke of it. For them it did not seem to exist, and in their intercourse with each other there was no hint of any living interest outside the daily toilet of one beautiful woman.

Then, one day in November, the tide rose to the doors of Lady Anstruther's great house. The servants whispered it among themselves, and the maid, Anne Smith, heard them as she went about her duties.

"Wounded and missing! Killed, p'r'aps. Well, it's what he wanted no doubt—going like that, just a private. Anyway, *she* won't cry her eyes out."

Anne Smith continued on her way stolidly. But her heart was beating a little faster as she entered the familiar dressing room. Perhaps she expected some change, for there was a hint of an almost cruel curiosity on the small, elfish face.

But there was no change.

Lady Anstruther sat beside her dressing table. She was playing idly with the rings on her slender hands. She held them to the light, watching their sparkle with a childish pleasure.

"The rose crêpe de Chine to-night, Anne."

"Yes, m'lady."

Anne Smith turned to the big wardrobe. And for that one moment, the lines of her tight little mouth were curved into a smile of infinite contempt.

V.

There were three people in the room—the old woman Harris, her son Jim, and Kit. They were seated close together around the table, and the light from the overhanging lamp framed them in a murky circle. Except for the man's voice, it was very quiet. The doors of the outer shop were closed, and the noise of traffic in the Walworth Road sounded dull, like the roar of a distant sea.

The two women scarcely spoke. Mrs. Harris, who was a little drunk, dozed fitfully, with her head resting on her hand, from time to time jerking herself awake and glancing at the girl beside her with a dull trouble in her rheumy old eyes. But Kit Hobson seemed to have forgotten her. She sat back in her chair as if she were trying to hold herself aloof. In her neat black coat and skirt, she should have made an odd splash of respectability in the sordid picture. But her face was not respectable. She had thrown off Anne Smith's demure disguise with the same completeness with which she had dropped her "h's" and her soft, subdued bearing. She was Kit Hobson, late of His Majesty's Prison, Holloway, in her time guttersnipe, sneak thief, shoplifter, and finally housebreaker in the grand style. She was hard bitten, already a little callous, a little cyni-

cal, for all the latent humor that still lurked in eyes and mouth.

Now her eyes were black and lowering and her mouth sullen.

The man leaned toward her, his coarse, square-fingered hand on a large square of printed paper, and talked rapidly, insistently.

"It's genuine—signed—dated—vised—not a weak 'inge. Never mind how I worked it. There it is. It'll see yer out of England safe as 'ouses. Once in Geneva, you're lost to 'em. They 'aven't the time to worry about the likes of us. Remember—it's your 'usband wots in Switzerland you're goin' to see—wounded and interned. Got that, 'aven't yer? It's a good line. You can turn on a tear or two, if you like."

"That's a weak 'inge, any'ow," she interrupted. "It's a lie. I ain't got no 'usband."

He grinned.

"You'll find one there, orl right. I'll cross by the same boat, and we'll meet at the address I've given yer. I know the chap there. He'll take our stuff and ask no questions. Afterward—with money in our pockets—why, we can skip, any'ow. America, for choice. Wot d'yer say, Kit?"

She stirred restlessly.

"I dunno. Seems to me a bit 'urried like. I ain't ready."

"You ain't ready? You know where she keeps the stuff, don't yer? They trusts yer—you said they did. They'll never think of yer till it's too late. Wot cher waitin' for?"

"I dunno."

He leaned a little closer to her. His jaw was thrust out threateningly. His small eyes snapped with anger.

"But I knows, though. And I'll 'ave a straight word with you, my girl. You've been puttin' me orf, week after week, and 'edged and lied and played the fool with me. Wot is it? Conscience—eh?"

She laughed resentfully, uneasily.

"Can yer see me with a conscience?"

"P'r'aps I can. They springs up in unlikely places. But if it ain't conscience, wot is it? D'yer love 'er precious ladyship so tender?"

"No," she said, between her teeth.

"So it ain't that, either. Shall I tell yer wot it is?"

She met his stare with black defiance.

"Yer welcome to try."

"Then it's yer precious 'Arry!" He brought his fist down savagely on the table so that the dirty glasses jangled. "You lied when you said you'd done with 'im. It's 'im yer thinkin' of. Yer waitin' for 'im to come 'ome and marry yer nice and proper, and set up a 'appy little 'ome and live like Salvation Army guys to the end of yer days!"

She sprang up violently.

"That's a lie! Didn't I let 'im go? Didn't I give 'im the chuck?"

"Yus, but you're sorry for it now. You'd 'ave 'im back if you could. I knows yer! You've been readin' all that newspaper truck. 'E's a 'ero now—yer brave defender—Gawd knows wot! That mealy-mouthed turncoat!"

"Steady—steady, Jim! I'll 'ave none of that!"

"Won't yer? Yer'll 'ave wot I choose to give yer."

He, too, had risen and now he lurched toward her, towering over her menacingly. But she neither flinched nor yielded ground, and suddenly his tone changed. It became very quiet—almost careless. It was dangerously good-humored. "I knows yer, Kit, my girl. When yer keen, you're brave as a lion. When you ain't keen, there's always a 'undred reasons why a thing shan't be done. Yer not keen on this. Yer tryin' to give me and my little job the chuck. But yer ain't goin' to do it, Kit. Yer ain't goin' to do it, my girl."

"Why not?" she asked, scarcely above her breath.

"There's two reasons. The first's this—yer precious 'Arry ain't comin'

back to yer. 'E 'asn't written. 'As it ever struck yer why not?"

"I'd done with 'im."

"Yus—and now 'e's done with everythin'. 'E's dead."

"You're lyin'!"

He took an old greasy paper from his pocket.

"It's ten weeks old. I kept it for you as a treat. 'Ere—see where I've marked it? 'Dorchester Regiment, Blakely, 304, H.' See the 'eading? 'Missin'. Believed killed.' A man wot's been missin' ten weeks these days and don't give no word of 'isself don't need no more 'believin'' abart. 'E's gone for good."

He watched and waited, but she gave no sign. Her face was blank—rather stupid looking. It was as if—suddenly—the real woman had been smashed, her temperament, her devilment and courage and audacity, wiped out, leaving nothing but a dull, animal life. He took her by the arm and shook her.

"And that ain't all—it's the least. Even if 'e weren't dead, it wouldn't 'elp yer. You'd stick to me—you'd see this job through. For why? If yer don't, I'll round on yer. I'll tell 'em 'oo you are—and wot yer after. I'll round on 'im. I'll tell wot I knows abart that last little affair. I'll 'ave 'im out of 'is fine uniform and in quod——"

She interrupted him with her first gesture.

"Wot's it matter—orl that? 'E's dead. Nothin' matters." She gave a silly, unsteady laugh. "Nothin' matters," she repeated listlessly, "nothin'."

There was a moment's silence. The old woman, who had fallen asleep, awoke suddenly and began to mumble to herself. She was dazed with drink and sleep, and seemed hardly conscious of the man and woman who faced each other under the light. She got up and staggered out into the shop, and they heard her droning a tuneless, senseless song.

The man picked up the passport and folded it neatly.

"I'll be round at twelve to-night. If orl's well, you'll have yer window dark. If it ain't safe, keep a light burnin'. The-rest's my job. To-morrow at nine, Charing Cross Station. You'll see me, but you won't know me, and I shan't know you. Got it clear?"

"Yes."

"And no monkey tricks, my girl. They won't pay you. Jim 'Arris don't allow no foolin', see?" He drained his half-empty glass with a sigh of satisfaction. "That's orl. You'd better 'op it now. Nice little respectable girls don't stay out after ten, and you've a bit of a way to go. To our next 'appy meetin', Kit!"

He made no effort to touch her or propitiate her. And in that deliberate indifference, there was a galling knowledge of power. But she did not look at him. She went out like a sleep-walker.

The old woman unlocked the shop door for her. She was still singing, but now there was a broken sense running through her song. She thrust something into the girl's hand as she passed.

"That's for you, dearie. 'It's a long, long way to Tip—Tip—Tipperary. It's a long——' It came for yer last week. 'E wouldn't let me give it yer. 'It's a long way to go——' I was to tear it up, but I couldn't. 'E was a brave lad. I likes 'em brave. A man ought to fight for 'is country, wotever she's done to 'im. A 'appy Christmas, dearie. Don't you fret—all the same in a 'undred years. 'Keep the 'ome fires burnin'——'"

The door closed. The girl stumbled over to the nearest light and smoothed out the crumpled envelope. But the little spark of hope was already dead. The writing was unknown; it conveyed nothing to her. She went on into the crowded thoroughfare. People turned

and looked after her, for there was something terrible and piteous in her face. And she was crying openly and shamelessly, as only those do for whom the world has suddenly been wiped out.

"It don't matter now," she whispered. "It don't matter. 'E's dead—and 'e'll never know. Oh, 'Arry—'Arry!"

She kept on whispering the name, and all the agony of life was crowded into that simple, toneless repetition.

VI.

But when she entered Lady Anstruther's room, she was just Anne Smith, who lived so that another woman might go out into the world perfectly clad and groomed, with the least possible trouble to herself. And as became her position, Anne Smith's face expressed nothing—neither grief nor love nor hate—and her manner was prim and her speech immaculate.

Lady Anstruther glanced up quickly as her maid entered. She stood in a wild array of clothes and dressing cases, and a smile of almost girlish excitement parted her lips. But the smile faded as she saw Anne Smith's face. Her radiance chilled. She was, in an instant, as she had always been—cold and emotionless and indifferent.

"I'm going away to-morrow," she explained briefly. "I have packed all I require. I shan't need you to-night. You can have a week's holiday, if you like. If I want you, I shall send for you."

"Yes, m'lady."

Lady Anstruther took her gold bag from her dressing table. Her hands shook a little. It was her only sign of feeling, and for once it escaped the keen eyes under the drooping lids.

"I want you to put this on my writing table and give it to me in the morning. I might forget it. It is important—a little traveling money and some papers. You will remember?"

"Oh, yes, m'lady."

"That's all, then."

"Yes, m'lady. Good night, m'lady."

"Good night."

Anne Smith closed the door softly. She went across the landing to the head of the stairs and listened. Everything was silent. She knew by the darkness in the hall beneath that the butler had been his rounds, and that there was no chance of being disturbed. Soft-footed as a panther, she crept down the thickly carpeted stairs. There had never been any place in her hard-fought life for clumsy blundering. The bolts of the hall door slipped back soundlessly. There was no clinking of a lock, no creaking of hinges, as the door itself was drawn ajar. And silent as she had come—swift and stealthy as a shadow—she fled upstairs, through the long passages to her own attic room.

She switched on the light. She was trembling as she had not trembled when she had walked down the steps of the Park Lane house into the arms of the police. Her breath came brokenly, in little smothered sobs.

"I've done it now," she whispered. "I've done it now."

She glanced at the alarm clock on the mantelshelf. There was still an hour before she need give the signal. She went over to the window and stood for a moment looking down into the empty street. The little lights below danced before her blurred eyes. And as she stood there, the thought of Harry grew clear—so vivid that he seemed to stand before her. She saw him as he had been that last night—wretched and desperate and alone. She saw him dead—she saw how he had died. But like a circle her thought came back to the living man who had pleaded with her.

"It's no good, 'Arry. It's no good," she whispered. "It's done now. Maybe if you'd come back—or if you wasn't dead—— But you've gone. It don't

matter now wot I do. Nothin' matters. Oh, 'Arry! 'Arry!" Suddenly she remembered the gold bag in her hands, and in a gust of rage she flung it from her. "Gawd, that woman! Wot's she care? 'Er man dead and my man dead—and she with a grin on 'er face! She ain't a woman. She's diamonds and jewels and fine clothes. She's got no 'eart—only a stone—a precious stone wot glitters and shines and's cold and 'ard. I 'ates 'er! I 'ates 'em all!"

Her rage stiffened her. Something grim and reckless and wicked hardened her small face. She drew out the passport and the letter that old Mother Harris had given her. She thrust the former into her own little leather bag; the latter she held, frowning at it.

It was strange that she had thought of it only now. And now it seemed to possess some queer, arresting power.

She slipped her finger under the flap of the censored envelope. There was only a slip of paper inside, covered with an ungainly scrawl that she knew well—that stopped the beating of her heart and drove it on again at a frantic gallop. At the top of the letter was an address in a Swiss town, and then came the painful, dogged writing :

I'm getting my pal what's with me here to send this to you. He's able to write better than me, being a gent, but he's a good sort for all that. He saved my life, and we was wounded together, and now we're here in the same hospital. We wasn't killed, but we was badly hit, and the Huns have pushed us on here to be quit of us. Perhaps you won't want to hear from me, but I had to write. I never stops thinking of you, girl. I hopes you're well and safe. It's mighty lonely out here. Crowds of people ain't you. Some of the chaps have got their wives coming to them for Christmas, and one chap's sweetheart's coming to marry him. There hopping about like boys, there that happy. I shall think of you, Kit. Though things have changed, we had great times together, and I shan't ever forget. But I had to go, Kit. Perhaps you know now that I had to, and perhaps you'll think kindly of me.

So long, Kit! Good luck.

Underneath, in the fine, neat writing that had deceived her on the envelope, there was a brief postscript.

Your friend says I've saved his life. I don't know that I have. He is very ill. When he is at his worst, he calls for you. He seems to have no people to care for him. If you can come to him, come at once. It may make all the difference. J. A.

How long she stood there staring at the scrap of foolscap, she did not know. She was aroused by the sound of a distant clock chiming the third quarter of the hour, and in a flash she was at her window, peering cautiously down into the quiet street. She fancied a shadow moved against the opposite wall, and a low sob of anger broke from her lips.

"The dirty dog!" she whispered. "The dirty dog! And now I've done it! It's too late! Oh, 'Arry—it's too late!"

But a thought leaped up in her like a streak of flame. She crept back. There was something tigerish in the swift silence with which she worked. In a minute all that she possessed of value was collected in a little hand bag. She was fully dressed before midnight counted itself out from the distant belfry. Then, at the last stroke, she drew aside the curtains of her window, letting out a pale, square flood of light.

"Maybe it's not too late, 'Arry. Maybe we'll win through yet."

For hours she watched, motionless, stoically patient. She saw the shadow creep out from its shelter, hesitate, and then glide away into deeper shadows. She saw the first glimmer of dawn light up the roofs of the opposite houses. She picked up the gold bag from the floor where she had thrown it.

"We've got to do it, 'Arry," she whispered. "We've got to 'ave money. But, Gawd helpin', it's the last time."

She made no sound as she crept down the solemn stairs. The heavy door clicked softly behind her. Once in the street, she sped away like a little be-

lated spirit of night, fugitive before the oncoming day.

VII.

It was like a dream, a nightmare. All the fears and terrors of her life culminated in that moment. The surging, uneasy crowd no longer sheltered her. She stood alone beside the big, square table and saw her passport spread out in dispassionate silence under the official eyes. She thought of all the cunning that had gone to the making of those many signatures—and of all the weaknesses that lurked under their effrontery. Her heart stood still as the official hand groped for the official stamp. The official eyes looked up at her, and it seemed to her that their scrutiny was less stringent—almost kindly.

"You're going to your husband in Switzerland?"

"Yes—I'm goin' to 'im—to my man."

The official stamp set itself firmly in its allotted place.

"There you are!" said the official voice, and another voice that was merely human added, "Good luck! A happy Christmas!"

Tears sprang to the girl's eyes.

"Same to you!" she said gayly.

There was a laugh, and she was hustled forward—along endless platforms and cobbled landing stages, by the side of smoky, grimy steamers, and up narrow, treacherous gangways. The crowd grew denser again, and carried her on over slippery decks, down steep stairs into a curious, nauseating stuffiness and twilight. There were other women with her in the big, square cabin where she found herself at last. They were of all ages, of all classes. But age and class seemed to have been melted down to a common humanity by the power of their common quest.

An old woman who had kept to Kit's side throughout looked up at her with her mild and faded eyes.

"You won't mind if I keeps you com-

pany, miss? I ain't got no one with me, and it's first time I've ever been on a real, live boat. It skeers me a bit. And orl them torpedoes flyin' round—— Never thought as 'ow I could 'ave faced it. But there—it's wonderful wot one can do." A little smile, half proud, half shy, lit up the wrinkled face. "I'm goin' to my son," she said softly.

"And I'm goin' to my man," Kit answered.

The old woman looked about her.

"Seems to me we're orl goin' to some one—swells and poor old folks like me—orl of us together." She shook her head pensively. "Queer wot this 'ere war 'as done for us, ain't it?"

"Queer enough."

"There was my Dick. Wild and 'eadstrong 'e was—no good for anything. And now they've given him the V. C. Queer, ain't it?"

Kit smiled down into the old face, eager with youthful love and pride. All the conversation had been just a stepping-stone to this great and wonderful thing.

"It's fine," she said. "Fine."

"The war's given us orl a chance," the old woman muttered. "Those wot's made a mess of their first page can just turn over and start clean. And them wot's written fair can write fairer."

She wandered off, and Kit saw her seat herself beside another woman. Soon all the ship would know of the son with the V. C. The smile lingered about the girl's mouth, but now all the cynicism and hardness had gone out of it.

"Start clean!" she echoed to herself. "That's wot 'Arry meant. But I didn't understand. I missed my chawnce. I'll not miss it twice."

The close, heated air below decks stifled her. When she clambered back up the companionway, the daylight had already thickened into a heavy fog. By the throbbing under her feet and the

ghostlike shadows that slipped past them, moving from nothing into nothing, she knew that they had already left the land. Strange faces were all around her, the sound of many tongues was in her ears. But the faces were blurred and the voices hushed. A vague fear seemed to rest on the cosmopolitan crowd. It was as if they knew that, somewhere out there in the yellow darkness, something lurked—waiting for them.

Kit made her way slowly forward. The prow of the ship was almost deserted. One man, who had his back toward her, leaned against the bulwarks staring seaward. She hardly noticed him. She came to a halt by a dim lantern and cautiously drew the gold bag from its hiding place in the bosom of her dress. The wisdom of the gutter and the prison was still with her. She knew that so valuable a thing might become a danger. The thin bundle of foreign money was swiftly transferred to her own purse. The thicker bundle of letters she held carelessly to the light. And then, for a long, breathless instant, the bag, her surroundings, her purpose—everything was forgotten. A little, incredulous exclamation escaped her lips and, hearing it, the man with his back toward her looked around.

But she did not see him. She was reading a letter—a love letter, written in a neat, familiar writing. Some of the phrases swam past her eyes without meaning; others stood out sharply; and all were warm with a splendid fearless ardor.

When I said that our bargain must come to an end, it was not hatred that made me speak—it was my love for you. I do love you. It was because I had to win you afresh that I went as I did. It was because I could not live without you that I left you. Can you understand that? It had become intolerable—our life together. We had to begin again. That was what I had meant to tell you. But I was hurt—silenced. In the face of your indifference, it seemed so useless.

Now—of late—I have begun to wonder. Something in your letters has given me hope. Perhaps it is the imagining of a hungry man. At any rate, I have played my part. They are going to give me the highest reward that a soldier can receive. I am proud of it. But glory is not everything.

If there is anything in my hope, come to me. If I have dreamed a dream in my captivity, let us end it here and now.

She read no further. She looked up dazedly.

"Gawd!" she muttered. "And she *was* goin' to 'im!"

The man standing against the bulwarks had come softly up to her. He laid a hand on her arm. She turned instantly, but she did not cry out. For a moment they stood there facing each other in a deadly silence.

"You're not surprised, are you?" he asked at last. "Did you really think I was so easy, Kit? Did you think I was such a mug?" He drove his fingers cruelly into her flesh. "You little treacherous viper! You thought you'd have the lot for yourself. Your cat's-paw, was I? I was to clear the way for you, whilst you stuffed yer pockets! I was to cool my 'eels waitin' for you!"

"It isn't true! Jim—I swear—I took nothin'——"

He pointed to the bag that she still held and grinned at her, showing the savagely clenched teeth.

"You must be fair scared to lie so badly as that, Kit."

"It's not a lie. It's all I took, Jim—I promise you. I've played square—always. You know I 'ave. I 'ad to 'ave money—I 'ad to go——"

"Where?"

She saw the ugly menace in his face. She knew dimly that here in this lonely twilight she was fighting for her life. She played her last card—an appeal to his humanity.

"'Arry's not dead, Jim," she said simply. "'E's alive—out there—and 'e's sent for me—and I'm goin' to 'im. If

ghostlike shadows that slipped past them, moving from nothing into nothing, she knew that they had already left the land. Strange faces were all around her, the sound of many tongues was in her ears. But the faces were blurred and the voices hushed. A vague fear seemed to rest on the cosmopolitan crowd. It was as if they knew that, somewhere out there in the yellow darkness, something lurked—waiting for them.

Kit made her way slowly forward. The prow of the ship was almost deserted. One man, who had his back toward her, leaned against the bulwarks staring seaward. She hardly noticed him. She came to a halt by a dim lantern and cautiously drew the gold bag from its hiding place in the bosom of her dress. The wisdom of the gutter and the prison was still with her. She knew that so valuable a thing might become a danger. The thin bundle of foreign money was swiftly transferred to her own purse. The thicker bundle of letters she held carelessly to the light. And then, for a long, breathless instant, the bag, her surroundings, her purpose—everything was forgotten. A little, incredulous exclamation escaped her lips and, hearing it, the man with his back toward her looked around.

But she did not see him. She was reading a letter—a love letter, written in a neat, familiar writing. Some of the phrases swam past her eyes without meaning; others stood out sharply; and all were warm with a splendid fearless ardor.

When I said that our bargain must come to an end, it was not hatred that made me speak—it was my love for you. I do love you. It was because I had to win you afresh that I went as I did. It was because I could not live without you that I left you. Can you understand that? It had become intolerable—our life together. We had to begin again. That was what I had meant to tell you. But I was hurt—silenced. In the face of your indifference, it seemed so useless.

Now—of late—I have begun to wonder. Something in your letters has given me hope. Perhaps it is the imagining of a hungry man. At any rate, I have played my part. They are going to give me the highest reward that a soldier can receive. I am proud of it. But glory is not everything.

If there is anything in my hope, come to me. If I have dreamed a dream in my captivity, let us end it here and now.

She read no further. She looked up dazedly.

"Gawd!" she muttered. "And she *was* goin' to 'im!"

The man standing against the bulwarks had come softly up to her. He laid a hand on her arm. She turned instantly, but she did not cry out. For a moment they stood there facing each other in a deadly silence.

"You're not surprised, are you?" he asked at last. "Did you really think I was so easy, Kit? Did you think I was such a mug?" He drove his fingers cruelly into her flesh. "You little treacherous viper! You thought you'd have the lot for yourself. Your cat's-paw, was I? I was to clear the way for you, whilst you stuffed yer pockets! I was to cool my 'eels waitin' for you!"

"It isn't true! Jim—I swear—I took nothin'——"

He pointed to the bag that she still held and grinned at her, showing the savagely clenched teeth.

"You must be fair scared to lie so badly as that, Kit."

"It's not a lie. It's all I took, Jim—I promise you. I've played square—always. You know I 'ave. I 'ad to 'ave money—I 'ad to go——"

"Where?"

She saw the ugly menace in his face. She knew dimly that here in this lonely twilight she was fighting for her life. She played her last card—an appeal to his humanity.

"'Arry's not dead, Jim," she said simply. "'E's alive—out there—and 'e's sent for me—and I'm goin' to 'im. If

you're a man, Jim, you'll not stand in my way now."

He stared down at her. And then he laughed.

"There's some one else on board 'oo'll do that for me," he said.

"Jim—wot cher goin' to do?"

"I'm goin' to find the owner of that gold bag of yours. P'r'aps you didn't know she was on board, did you? 'Appy family party, ain't it? And when I've found 'er, I'll explain matters a bit all round. P'r'aps you won't get to 'Arry this time after all. P'r'aps 'Arry, when 'e gets 'ome, will find a guard of honor waitin' for 'im——"

"Jim!" she pleaded. "Jim!"

He flung her off.

"None of that! I told yer wot to expect. I've done with yer."

But even as she fell back from his brutal menace, she saw him falter. Perhaps it was premonition—an animal instinct sensing the approach of danger—that held him. The next instant, the blow had fallen. A monster's fist, sinister and invisible, drove against the ship's side and flung her shuddering and broken from her course. She staggered, lurched helplessly. A silence more awful than that sickening thud lasted for an instant—then ripped asunder with the scream of a man in agony. An order was flung against it, and it went down in the roar of the reversing engines and the rush of feet. Like an animal mortally wounded, the ship churned the water about her to a foaming fury.

"Torpedoed! My God!"

"Steady! Women and children first!"

But the first man to act is the man who sets the seal of conduct upon all. Jim Harris was the first. At one bound, he had reached the lifeboat swung out in readiness on the starboard side. A wild horde of panic-stricken men and women rushed at his heels, deaf to orders and entreaties. They understood

nothing but that awful, insidious list to port from which they fought their way up the slippery deck. Gasping, groaning, cursing, they tore at one another. And those who went down before the rush never rose again.

Kit had held aloof. Training in crime had made her cool and resolute in the hour of peril. She had seized a life belt from the bulwarks and bound it about her. Her plans were made. She would wait quietly—bide her time—take her chance when it came.

Her chance!

The little old woman with the hero son was driven past. She had been upheld by the denseness of the crowd; now suddenly the pressure broke, and she went down with a little choking cry that seemed to rise even above that tumult. Kit saw the woman next her bend down, striving to lift the exhausted body, setting herself to stem the murderous rush—an act in itself reckless, heroic.

Her chance!

Then Kit saw clear. It was like a light striking through the darkness. She sprang forward. In an instant she was in the thick of it. With the strength of a man, she flung herself against the tide. She set herself shoulder to shoulder with that unknown, heroic comrade. They did not speak to each other or look at each other, but the consciousness of their spiritual unity was a bond of steel that bound them together—held them steady in that first onslaught.

Kit raved and swore and blasphemed.

"You cowards—you damned, infernal cowards! You ain't English—you ain't human—you ain't anythin', you blasted, lily-livered swine! Stand back or I'll tear the eyes out of yer!"

They did not all understand her words, but they understood her voice, her flaming scorn and fury. They understood the significance of those two women holding the ground, fighting for

that crumpled, black little heap. They were ashamed. And in that moment of wavering, the davits of the overloaded lifeboat snapped, and the scream that ended in the hideous crash of bursting timber left them stupefied and broken.

It was over. The ship's officers fought their way through. The demented, uncontrollable horde became a herd of frightened sheep, yielding without question. In a minute, Kit and her companion were left alone with the old woman, lying still unconscious between them. Their eyes met for the first time. In the light of the ship's lamp, they recognized each other.

"Gawd—'er ladyship!"

"Anne!"

"Kit—Kit 'Obson, if yer don't mind, late of 'Olloway. I took yer gold bag. I don't know where it is now—and any'ow you won't want it for a bit. 'Ere—take this, instead."

It was her life belt.

Lady Anstruther did not move. She was panting still, and there was a little blood on the beautiful face. And she was wholly changed. They looked at each other curiously; their masks were off. There was no class between them now; they were simply human. The nearness of death was nothing to this discovery of each other.

"I don't care who you are," Lady Anstruther said. "You're brave—you're the bravest thing I know."

"Garn! 'Scuse me—I talks that way when I ain't on business. Take it—I wants yer to take it."

"I won't. Do you think I would?"

"I wants yer to. I wants to go with clean 'ands. I wants to pay up—clear out with a clean sheet——"

"You have paid up. And I won't do a low-down thing like that."

The little old woman with the hero son moaned a little. They bent down over her. In a moment, the contest

between them was over—their problem solved. There was no need of words.

"It's a dog's chance," Kit said simply. "But it is a chance, and she's welcome to it, poor soul. She's got a son out there, and we've——" She broke off. Her face was turned from the light. "I've got my boy," she muttered. "I served him cruel bad."

"My husband doesn't know that I am coming," Lady Anstruther said quietly. "He won't know now. I had so much to tell him. He will never quite understand."

Kit shook her head.

"I dunno. P'r'aps—some'ow—they'll know just 'ow it was."

A ship's officer ran past.

"Best stay where you are. No immediate danger. Help coming."

He vanished. Night had crept up swiftly, adding its blackness to the dense fog. The lamp overhead grew dim and spectral. It was bitterly cold. It was as if the cold had frozen the world into silence. Here and there an order was shouted. But gradually the silence predominated, waiting, watchful, pregnant with hope.

The little old lady was conscious now and crying like a timid, frightened child. They drew her into the shelter of the cabin walls. They huddled close to one another. To give one another comfort they talked of themselves—of their lives and errors and of their loves, of those to whom they were going, who waited for them.

And because that last was more than they could bear, Kit told them the adventure of the Park Lane house—of Harry and the police and the dear old josser who ran Holloway Prison.

She made them laugh in the face of death.

The night wore on. They did not hear the sounds of approaching help. Worn out with cold and exhaustion, they slept together. And the arm of

the jailbird was thrown about the shoulder of Lady Anstruther and held her fast.

VIII.

It was the following night in the converted hotel of a little Swiss village. A nurse moved swiftly and silently down the long lane of white beds, giving her final glance around. As she came to the last two of all, she addressed the occupants with a severity that her tone belied.

"Now I do hope you two are going to behave," she said. "You kept every one in the ward awake last night with your tossings and sighings. You've got what you wanted. They're coming as fast as steam can bring them. Now try and show how thankful you are by keeping quiet."

"As mice!"

"Not a bloomin' toss, nurse."

"Well, mind you do!" she admonished, inconsequent, but authoritative.

Five minutes after the door closed on her, Sergeant Anstruther gave his first signs of life. He lifted himself cautiously on his elbow.

"Blakely!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Confound your 'yes, sirs!' Did you notice—those two telegrams? They were sent from Paris—the same place—the same time. They must have been there together and not known."

"Yes, sir. I did notice." He lay still a moment, smiling to himself in the darkness. "Queer 'ow war brings folks together, ain't it?"

"Very. Good night. It'll be some Christmas, after all."

"You betcher life!" said Private Blakely drowsily.

